Issue Eleven November 2019

aargh!

Aotearoa Anarchist Review

WELL. THAT HISTORIAN a couple of decades ago who claimed that history was over must be feeling a right idiot now. This year the globe has been immersed in the mad cap politics of Trump, on-going refugee crises, war in the Middle East, stepped-up state repression in China, riots and protests in Hong Kong, France, Lebanon, Sudan, West Papua, Catalonia, Ecuador, Iraq and Chile, the Brexit pantomime, not to mention the increasing impacts of climate change. And that's just a sample of the events of 2019.

Closer to home the great shock was the Christchurch massacre, but discontent has been on the rise too, with the occupation at Ihumātao, huge climate change protests and disputes over the government's celebration of the anniversary of James Cook's colonial adventurism.

This issue of *aargh!* focuses on the somewhat unexpected re-emergence of large-scale protest. While ongoing discontented rumbles about the crumbling environment, inequality, lack of housing, colonisation and other issues have been growing louder for some time, this year has seen people taking to the streets in greater numbers than for many years.

We take a look at lessons from activist history in this country, and interview an activist from the long-running ZAD airport site occupation in France.

We wonder about the possible future of climate change activism in light of the lack of continuity of protest here. A situation that sees new generations of activists having to re-invent the wheel with little knowledge of the successes and failures of past movements.

We also have an update on Australia's continuing state atrocities inflicted on asylum seekers on Manus Island – an issue that hasn't been much protested here, but fully deserves to be.

So, happy reading, and see you on the barricades!

aargh! is an anarchist periodical produced in
Wellington, Aotearoa, by the Freedom Shop Collective.

If you'd like another copy of this one, send us an envelope addressed to yourself and with an appropriate stamp and we'll mail you one. Send us ten dollars and we'll send five copies for you to give to your friends and family, who are bound to be delighted. Also feel free to send us money for more copies of issue five or a ten dollar subscription for the next four issues. We don't know when the next issue will come out, but it's sure to happen sometime.

Contact us by e-mail at freedomshopaotearoa@gmail.com
or, if you are conversant with the technology, write to us by 'post' at
P.O. Box 9263,
Wellington 6141,
Aotearoa/New Zealand

And check our blog for news and events at
freedomshopaotearoa.blogspot.co.nz
ISSN 2382-1353 (Print)
ISSN 2382-1361 (Online)

Ten things I have learned about activism

By Sam Buchanan

1. Don't be polite

I can't swear it's never happened, but so far as I know, nobody ever won a campaign by being polite and respectful. Our job is to win, not make friends. We will constantly be told that being scruffy and angry puts people off and prevents us being taken seriously. That actually means "You are bothering us and we wish you'd shut up".

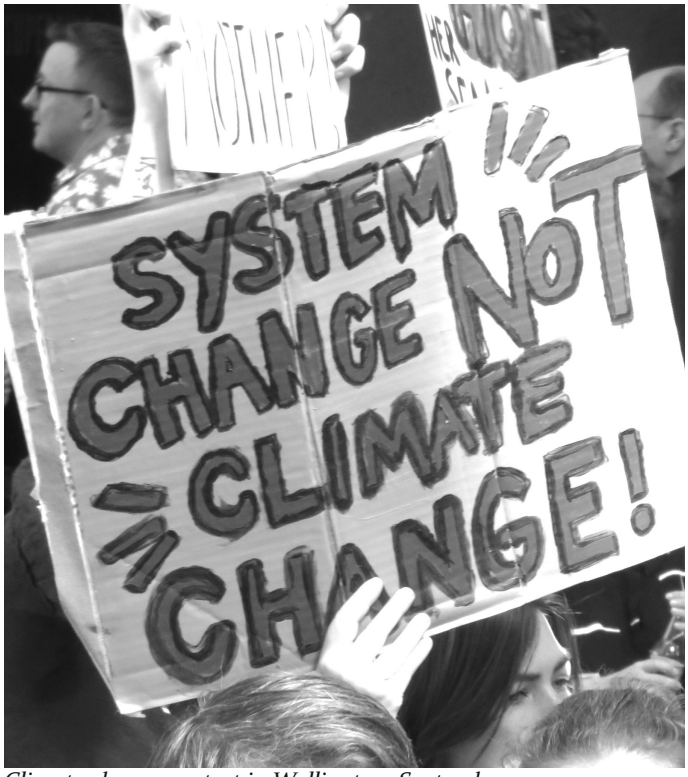
The best way to create reform in an institution is to scare the pants off it and make it feel that if it doesn't offer concessions, its existence is threatened. Historically, most of the reforms of capitalism – the welfare state, worker's rights, higher wages, etc. – came about when capitalists were terrified of being supplanted by socialism, not because workers were asking nicely for a better deal.

Lately I've been meeting a lot of well-educated, thoughtful, elderly, liberals who spent much of their lives earnestly and courteously advocating for the reform of various institutions. They are now all miserable and feel they have completely failed. Which they have.

2. Shift the goalposts

Winning a partial goal can be a disaster for a movement. Setting small steps towards a final victory is important (that victory isn't going to happen quickly), and realising them gives a sense of progress, but don't get so stuck on an achievable goal that everyone comes to see it as the main event, and loses interest when you've won, thinking the job is over.

The anti-apartheid movement were really good at moving their goalposts – when something began to look possibly winnable in the next couple of years (such as getting the South African embassy closed down), they began work on the next goal (a complete trade ban), so kept up the movement's momentum (it also back-footed their opponents, who were often fighting already lost battles). The peace movement, in contrast, became so obsessed with the nuclear-free campaign that the movement almost vanished overnight when it was won, and other issues that had been part of the wider campaign; broader anti-militarist objectives, decolonisation in the Pacific, etc., disappeared from view.



Climate change protest in Wellington, September 2019

Adding new and bigger demands also makes the old ones look moderate. Your opponents may feel they have to give in to those in order to head off larger changes (them giving in to moderate demands must be hailed as a victory, and a sign of the ability of your movement to win bigger things).

3. Be good at meetings

As activists, we are going to be stuck in meetings. That's inevitable. Getting meetings right is important. Don't be in a rush, take time to reach consensus. Keep good notes and learn to communicate clearly. Choose good facilitators. Activists are actually pretty good at meetings, for all their moaning about them. If you want to see really bad meetings, join the workforce. Professionals suck at meetings.

Page two

And sometimes things are going to be hard work and unrewarding, but if nobody is laughing during meetings, we are doing something wrong. Willingness to make jokes is a litmus test of trust, and hence, of a good organising culture.

4. Don't follow overseas examples slavishly

Sometimes people overseas have great ideas that are worth replicating. Sometimes they have stupid ideas, or ones that might work where they are, but will fall flat here. One size does not fit all, the culture, history and environment here is different.

Trust your instincts and lead the world, don't let the world lead us. Remember, the rest of the world is mostly an even worse mess than here. People in other countries haven't demonstrated that they have much to boast about, so far as sorting their shit out goes.

5. The history of activism is completely wrong

Mainstream journos and writers don't have a clue about how activism works, or its history. Very little activist history is recorded, and what is documented is often due to its media worthiness – conflict and 'colourfulness' – rather than its actual importance. The dull, but necessary, work doesn't feature, nor does a great deal of grassroots protest.

Often, history reflects US dominance of the media, and hence is coloured by nostalgia for 1960s counter-culture, which created little real change in New Zealand. On the other hand, Māori and feminist movements, which have been hugely effective, are pretty much ignored. There's a rich history of activism in this country, get to know it and be part of it (and don't believe anyone who tells you something hasn't happened here before).

One historian calculated that the best-attended protests which have ever taken place in Aotearoa/NZ were those against post office closures in the 1990s. They were barely recorded. Everyone knows about the 1981 anti-apartheid protests, but nobody remembers the 1985 protests. Which were bigger.

6. Don't trust people who don't do the shit work

Sometimes you'll meet activist 'experts' who think they are too important to do ordinary jobs, and just want to be the leaders / speakers / facilitators / gurus. They've completely missed the point and anything they say has to be judged accordingly.

Back in the day, I judged people by their willingness to go out on a miserable night and paste up posters. If not, they didn't count as 'activists'. There must be a modern equivalent.

7. You can't win by being over-committed

Driving ourselves mad by throwing ourselves into endless activist work isn't going to help anyone. Neither is demanding massive amounts of energy from others, or making martyrs of ourselves. Commitment is overrated – it's very doubtful that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens has ever changed the world significantly. Usually that takes a mass movement.

In the same vein, well-thought out 'arrestable' actions with lots of people can be very effective, simply throwing ourselves at police lines or locking on to something isn't. For some people the latter actions fill a need to feel they are doing something that reflects the urgency of the situation. But I'm afraid things are going to take longer than you think, so we need to sustain ourselves for the long haul.

Some years ago three Christians were arrested after damaging the satellite interception spy station at Waihopai. They planned the action well, it was visually spectacular, they put a lot of energy into explaining their motivations, and the resulting court case (which they won) gained massive media attention and drew a lot of attention to the New Zealand government's intelligence operations. Some years earlier a larger group of people (about ten) were arrested during a protest at the base. Nobody much noticed.

8. Never align yourself with a political party

Movements need a broad base, there's nothing to be gained by being seen to be closely associated with a particular party, which might put off supporters who, for whatever reason, don't happen to like that party.

We want parties to be jostling with each other to win our support, and none of them to feel they can take us for granted. Politicians need to be made to feel they must constantly work to win some grudging acknowledgement from us. They are our employees, after all.

9. Deal with the shit in your own movement

Nothing is more likely to wreck a movement than the people in the movement. Don't let an unaccountable elite form. Pay attention to internal democracy. Make sure decision-making processes are clearly defined. Don't let anyone profit from the movement or turn themselves into professional leaders who are mostly concerned about the movement's ability to raise funds to pay their salaries.

Deal with any instances of sexual abuse or harassment as a priority. Don't be single-minded and think that a group's particular goal can be achieved without a commitment to fairness and respect in other areas. Never let people's bad behaviour be swept under the carpet for 'the good of the movement'.

10. This one's up to you

Don't let people like me tell you what to do all the time @@@

Unfuck the World

THE SCHOOL STRIKE for 4 Climate has turned out some impressive protests in the last year. The most recent was certainly the biggest protest in Wellington since the Foreshore and Seabed Hikoi fifteen years ago, and possibly bigger (I'm a bit cynical about the claim that 40,000 people took part, but it was bigger than anything I've been to since the 1980s).

It was also a pleasant culture: lots of creative home-made placards, not a bunch of pre-printed things with the 'official' slogans; some fiery no-fucks-given speeches; and, while being allowed to make speeches, politicians were at least made to wait until the kids had finished speaking. Sure, they've been far from revolutionary, but given how protests have been lately – either rowdy but very small, or large and dull – this all felt pretty good.

The demands of the march were reformist, but fairly strong: "a comprehensive plan in place to halve our carbon emissions by 2030", "a legally enforceable plan to get to net zero carbon by 2040", "cease all new exploration and extraction of oil, coal and gas. This includes not granting any extensions of existing permits." But the demands were barely mentioned, and I'd doubt many participants actually knew what they were.

Our current rulers came in to office promising a 'transformative government'. What's likely to be delivered looks largely like window dressing. The proposed 'Zero Carbon Act' has no legal consequences if targets aren't met, and sets targets that are low or distant – 2050 being the date set for 'zero carbon' (actually a balance of emissions against supposed carbon sinks), and allows targets to be partially breached by buying 'carbon credits' from overseas. The bill was formulated around gaining a consensus within parliament, a strategy led by the Green Party, but already National Party MPs are saying they won't vote for it unless targets are further lowered.

The same politicians calling for 'transformation' will happily say 'no new taxes' but never 'no new roads'. They'd rather burn some rainforests than their own political capital. Targets for emission reductions are easy to talk about as they don't specify what actual actions need to be taken. Politicians, including the Greens, still talk as if we can have everything – consumption, flights, capitalism – and just need to plant more trees and make technical and methodological changes to production. In New Zealand, even a weak reformist proposal such as the 'Green New Deal' hasn't been put on the table.

The question is, where to from here? The movement faces the difficult task of turning popularity into political clout, something seldom discussed. Many social democrats assume that broad support will inevitably turn into political power, which is clearly not the case. Both the government and the climate change movement are facing a similar issue – popularity can be very broad, and at the same time,

Climate change protest in Wellington, September 2019

very shallow. A great many people are concerned about climate change, and will march down the street, but so far there's no sign they will change how they vote on this issue, let alone run down Lambton Quay smashing windows.

Protest movements influence governments in three ways: if they sway public opinion sufficiently, a party may adopt their policies as they think there's votes in it; if civil disobedience gets sufficiently out of control, governments get scared of the consequences of not acting; or if a movement can create a climate in which governments feel morally obliged to act. The last seems the hoped for aim of the climate movement, but actually is the hardest to achieve. It might work when the consequences are minimal, such as stopping sporting contacts with South Africa back in the day. But that's a far cry from demanding the economy be transformed.

Twenty years ago, the 'anti-globalisation' movement was based on international solidarity, and in opposition to global inequality. After left social democrats abandoned it, it has largely been taken over by nationalists and conspiracy theorists. The same opposition to international financial institutions such as the WTO and the World Bank exists, but now it's based on supposed unfairness to rich countries and championed by Donald and assorted sub-Trumps around the world. Given the decent, but vague, doctrines of the climate change movement, it's not unthinkable that it could go the same way.

A demagogue promising serious government action, while blaming other countries or ethnicities, could scoop many people up based on the need for 'urgency'. Especially when the current government can't seem to get into their heads that people are seriously pissed off about a lot of things: inequality – particularly pertaining to housing and low wages, climate change, Ihumātao, health services, incarceration rates... Not everyone is annoyed about the same thing, but there are many issues demanding serious political attention. The government isn't delivering on these things, which feeds the increasingly desperate search for someone who will.

A further danger is the disdain expressed by a few activists for ordinary people. Both in London and Wellington, Extinction Rebellion activists targeted public transport, some justifying it by saying people need to be jerked out of their apathy by having their lives disrupted. But people aren't dumb, or asleep – they are stressed and powerless. They aren't in a coma, they are tied up. Everyday life in a capitalist/consumerist system is designed to keep you just alive enough to work and reproduce. It's not that you don't understand what's going on, it's that you are struggling for mental and physical survival and don't have the time or energy to take on a system that invests huge resources in defending itself.

Those people may well be fully aware of the situation. How do we judge that they are not? Because they don't want to lie down in front of buses? Because they put feeding their kids ahead of sorting out the world's problems? Perhaps they are also better at judging the strength of the enemy than activists (many of whom, against all historical experience, think we can change the entire global economic system by getting a few thousand people arrested at a non-violent protest).

It's hopelessly arrogant to respond to this state of affairs by claiming these people are asleep and need enlightened people to wake them up.

What creates change is not having your life disrupted by a protest, but raised aspirations. To take a recent example. The occupation at Ihumātao brought in thousands of people – far more than Extinction Rebellion has managed to do – by offering both an achievable goal and a possibility of joining a community/movement that is committed to achieving it. There was a whiff of victory in the air. They welcomed people, rather than going around South Auckland disrupting buses and sneering about other Māori 'being asleep'.

Of course, there are significant differences between Ihumātao and the climate change movement. The aim of the former is the return of a small block of land, though the issue of ownership of this land brings into question the entire history of the New Zealand colonial project.

The climate change movement has more parallels with the historic and on-going feminist project – a re-evaluation of the values and practices of society and its institutions from the ground up. This is a movement that has been extraordinarily successful (to the extent that its demands have become so normalised as to be not noticed), but is seldom held up as a model. Its history is mostly ignored.

People will do extraordinary things when they have hope of real change. They need to see a movement that offers that, and works toward that goal. It remains to be seen whether the climate change movement can become that, or whether 'business as usual' is merely opposed by 'politics as usual'. @@@

The Far Right after Christchurch

By Peppertree

The reaction of the far-right groups following the Christchurch terror attack was prompt – almost suspiciously prompt. Before media reports were even clear about what exactly had happened, the Dominion Movement's website was disabled and showed a message in which they condemned "the events in Christchurch" and announced that they would be "ceasing all operations immediately". The website was taken down a few days later. The National Front put up a rather bizarre message saying that "at the present time, the events in Christchurch do not involve the NZ National Front or its members." Their web site stayed up for a while but is now also dead.

The state also reacted quickly by changing the gun laws and charging 35 people for possession of the killer's video. 14 people were prosecuted. The others, most of them teenagers were referred to the youth court or given a warning. One person, Philip Arps was given a 21-month prison sentence. Three years earlier he had filmed himself while dumping a pig's head outside the Al-Noor mosque and talking about a "cull".

For a short time, the far right remained quiet. And then they emerged again. In May, less than two months after the attack, white supremacist stickers from the European Students Association appeared at Auckland University. There were also reports about people being attacked on campus.

The group had formed in 2017 and disbanded officially shortly after when too many students protested. In response to the new stickers, the vice chancellor Stuart McCutcheon engaged in blanket denial of any far-right activity at the university. Why the students didn't just remove the stickers and chase the Nazis off campus, I don't know.

In early July, the head of the Austrian identitarian movement, Martin Sellner, to whom Brentan Tarrant had donated €1500 the year before, landed a brilliant PR coup. He decided to pass some of the money on to Christchurch Victim Support, the organisation that supports the victims of the March shooting. And the NZ media fell for it. Both TVNZ and Radio NZ ran interviews with Sellner, where he was given a platform and was allowed to present himself as the true victim of Tarrant. The donation had defamed him and caused him harm, he said, and he wanted to do the right thing and 'donate' the money to the Christchurch victims. In fact it was nothing but a money laundering exercise because he knew that there was no way Victim Support would want to keep the money, so they had to return it to him. In the end he got his money back and received free publicity as well, funded by NZ On Air.

In August, a new organisation announced itself on the internet – Action Zealandia, a group of young white men (no women, disabled people or "degenerates" allowed) who "stand against our degradation". Like other identitarian neo-Nazis they believe that the government is planning a genocide against Europeans. And like the Dominion Movement, they talk a lot about consumerism in long rambling articles. Also like the DM, they post reports about monthly 'actions' where apparently they go for a walk, collect one small plastic bag of rubbish and then have a barbecue, finishing off with the obligatory photo in macho pose with the NZ flag and pixilated faces. They claim to have a presence in Auckland, Palmerston North and Christchurch.

In October, Action Zealandia stickers also appeared at Auckland Uni. This time the vice chancellor stopped denying their existence, instead saying that the stickers were "unfortunate", but he couldn't do anything about them because they "are not of themselves hate speech, they are not illegal, they are not inciting people to violence." Of course they're not, today's Nazis aren't that stupid.

If there is one thing the far-right groups have learned, it is to not be too direct in their statements. They know how to use a language that flies below the radar of hate speech or inciting violence. Taken in isolation, a lot of their messages sound almost harmless. But to those who want to hear, the message is clear.

Case in point is above mentioned Phil Arps. For years he has had the "black sun" symbol and the numbers 14 and 88 on the side of his vans. Obviously most people didn't recognise either of them as Nazi symbols and codes.

So while the National Front and the Dominion Movement have disappeared from public view, they haven't gone away. And thanks to the mainstream media who conduct interviews with people like Martin Sellner as if they were just a bit more to the right than the National Party, their ideology is entering the mainstream. Following the Sellner interview on TVNZ, radio talkback "presenter" Duncan Garner claimed that Sellner was simply someone with "deeply conservative views which many people will find acceptable". @@@

Worth Defending

Chloé Boiteaux is a film maker with the collective Les Scotcheuses, a collective which made two films about the ongoing occupation against a proposed new airport in Notre Dame de Landes in the North-West of France, called the ZAD. After a struggle spanning decades, the French government finally cancelled the project in 2018, but the occupation is still ongoing. There are now a number of occupations in Europe who call themselves ZAD, following the same concept.

Chloé talks about the history and what it's all about. The films screened in Wellington in June and in Auckland earlier in the year.

aargh!: Let's start at the beginning – what does ZAD mean?

Chloé: ZAD now means zone à défendre, zone to defend, but in the beginning the official term for ZAD was zone d'aménagement différé.

Deferred development?

Yes, they chose that land, more than 1500 hectares, in 1963 for that project. They started to buy the land, farmers were invited to sell their land to the government and leave. It started slowly, but pretty much from the beginning, some people didn't agree to leave. Not only peasants but also population who didn't want an airport near their villages.

So there were small struggles in the beginning. And then in 1973 we had the petrol crash, so the project was pretty much forgotten. The '70s in France was also a period of many struggles, social, political and environmental, like against nuclear power in Brittany. So they just forgot it.

In 2000, the Prime Minister revived the project and now there were more people fighting against it because they were more organised, in organisations, associations, citizens organisations, peasant organisations to try to save the land.

So in 2008, they organised a climate camp to invite activists and people concerned about the environment and against capitalism to come to the zone. That was pretty successful and some activists decided to occupy the farms where people had already left. Since then, the number of activists increased more and more.

In 2012 there was a big police operation for several months to try and evict the occupiers. It was pretty much like a war there. Many, many people from around Europe joined the struggle to save the land. It lasted for several months, but they didn't manage to evict people. They destroyed a lot of huts, houses and shelters. But when they were destroyed, people were rebuilding the structures again every time. So finally after months of fighting, the police left and the lands were still free.

The activists also started agricultural activities, like growing potatoes and beef farming, but always on a small scale. And some of them were using horse power.

And they started to build a village – so it was like a big spread community with 60 tiny places were people were living. Many of them were self-sufficient and autonomous. So there was a bakery, there was someone producing a newspaper, they have a radio, they produce beer. There was a library and a free market.

So it changed from being a protest against the airport to being an alternative community?

Yes, from that it became larger, so they were struggling against the airport and against its world, so basically against the capitalist society.

In that context we went there to make the movies. It was kind of an event for the people living there, it was another activity, actually.

So between 2016 and 2018 there was more pressure on the zone, because the government was pushing ahead, but it was always stepping forward, stepping backward for two years. The airport project became more and more unpopular amongst the different governments, amongst the population, and the pressure became higher and higher, but finally during the spring of 2018, they decided to cancel the project. Because it was too big.

Surprisingly, it wasn't a socialist government that cancelled the project, it was Macron, and it was one of his first big actions.

Were there conflicts with the construction company as well as with the police?

Of course, they sent workers regularly to survey the land and the infrastructure. They started building the road to the airport, but they never finished it. But every time, they were kicked out. And there was also sabotage. Trucks, any kind of machine that had to do with the project.

Have there been problems with infiltrators?

Yes, that's why I never met someone giving me their real name, at least in the beginning. And they all change their names regularly, because they are always scared about infiltrators. It happened many times.

What has happened since it was cancelled?

We won the struggle against the airport! But many occupiers were there for almost 10 years, so some of them started to really settle there and started alternative projects which were working and lasting. Agricultural projects and alternative ways of life. Many of them want to stay there and continue their project and show that it's possible to live like that, self-sufficient and autonomous. But of course the government doesn't really like that idea, so they want to evict the people. They tried to evict the people several times since 2018. They destroyed several main houses but still people are coming back to rebuild and restart over and over.

There are also some collectives who are trying to find a legal way to stay there and continue their agricultural projects. They are in that process but it's a lot of paperwork and the government says yes, no, yes, no. And even amongst the occupiers it's controversial, because if they start to stay there legally it means that they own land and that was not the idea at the beginning. So it creates conflicts within the movement too because there are many different visions of the ZAD.

There are also farmers who never left and became activists, but only a few. The other ones left, got their money and now some of them want to get their land back. So there is also a struggle between those people and the people who saved the land. Because if they come back it means they will continue the conventional agriculture and that's what the occupiers and the activist farmers don't want.

How many people are there at the moment?

Right now I don't really know but when the project was cancelled there were between 200 and 300 staying there permanently in those 60 places.

Do they see themselves as anarchists?

I think most of them, but not all of them. I think you have to have a certain state of mind to be able to survive and live there and be integrated and enjoy your stay there. But there are so many different political currents inside the zone. There are people who are really radical, so they see the ones who want to settle for good and do agricultural activities as capitalists. There are even different zones inside the zone. The east of the zone was considered like the capitalist side and the west more left-wing where some didn't even want to touch the land. Sometimes it was really complex.

Are there international connections with similar occupations?

Yes, there are many linkages, people from all those struggles all over Europe are coming there and occupiers from there go into the other places, too. There is a huge solidarity and there are exchanges between the zones, to help each other. It's a big network now. The idea about the ZAD was to make it like a shelter for activists from all over the world, to stay, to hide or to do participate in the life of the zone.

What motivated you to make the films?

Les Scotcheuses ("the film cutters"), we are a collective, who are all into activism and all interested in artistic things like performance, cinema, music. At the beginning when we made the first movie, we were not a big collective but a bunch of activist friends who knew some people staying in the zone, so they were interested to get us to do something with them and to speak about the struggle, but in our way, and doing workshops and participating in the struggle.

For the first movie, we went there and we started to rebuild a shelter just to have a place to stay, and also because it was supposed to be the visitors centre. But when we came it was pretty much in a bad state so we rebuilt it with some of the occupiers. That made it easier to be integrated in the zone and we got to know more people and talked to them about the project and about the workshops we wanted to do.

What can people do to support?

Hmm, from abroad? It's so far. Right now the best way to support them is to go there and help them to rebuild. On their web site they have an agenda and they are always announcing the different workshops, the big events or activities to make people come and help. Or they are organising conferences or shows or screenings, or that kind of activities.

And on the web site they have also links to other struggles. And they also speak about the events for the other struggles. Oh yes, and the web site is partly in English, but not everything. @@@

For more information, go to zad.nadir.org

Six Years With No Hope

By Peppertree

ONE THING we at *aargh!* can't be accused of is that we haven't written about the situation in Australia's offshore detention centres. Every issue of aargh! had at least one piece on the subject, and so will this one.

July 20, 2019 marked the sixth anniversary of Australia's indefinite offshore detention regime, which meant that anyone seeking asylum by boat would be detained offshore and would never be allowed to enter Australia. Now, about 320 men are still stranded in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea. Another 300 men and women are in a similar situation on Nauru. While about 270 have been resettled in the US and Canada, the hopes of those remaining of ever getting out are getting slimmer by the day.

When in October 2017, the Australian-run "Regional Processing Centre" on Manus Island was officially closed, all the 600 men were forcefully moved to supposedly better facilities in Lorengau, about 30km away. The closure of the original centre came about as a result of a PNG Supreme Court decision that locking people up without charge was a violation of human rights.

The new centres in Lorengau were officially run by PNG, and the refugees were officially free to come and go, but the reality was different. The Australian government very much still controlled what was happening. 'Security' at the camps was provided by an Australian company called Paladin, which appears to mainly consist of a web site and a letter box in Canberra. After a number of attacks by angry locals, a curfew was imposed. The very limited medical facilities were closed and the refugees had to compete with locals for treatment at the hopelessly stretched local hospital.

Over the next two years, about 270 refugees were settled in the US (under an agreement between former PM Tony Abbott and former President Obama) and Canada. But due to Trump's ban on immigration from Muslim countries, for a lot of them this avenue is blocked. The Australian government is refusing to allow anyone to be settled in NZ, so that option is also denied.

Earlier this year, the refugees had one big hope – a change of government at the Australian elections in May 2019. They hoped that a Labor government would finally change the policy and allow them to settle in Australia, or at least accept NZ's offer of

"The only boat I want you to stop is that fucking Endeavour reenactment" - Protest in Melbourne

resettling 150 of them a year here. Instead, Scott Morrison (who proudly displays a 'trophy' on his desk of a refugee boat with the words "I stopped these") was re-elected. How devastating this was becomes clear by the fact that in the three months following the election there were over 100 suicide attempts in Lorengau.

Then another slither of hope appeared when in July 2019, on the sixth anniversary of the "turn back the boats" policy, the PNG Prime Minister James Marape met with Scott Morrison to talk about ending the detention. "We will ensure that we have a mutually workable timetable and closure program that is healthy for all of us – but more importantly, healthy for those people who have been part of us in Manus and PNG," Marape said. It sounded like the situation would finally come to an end.

What happened was that in August and September, all inmates were transferred from Manus Island to Port Moresby, the capital of PNG. There they were distributed across a number of locations, depending on their situation: those awaiting resettlement in the US were put in one hotel, those waiting for an interview with US Immigration in another, those requiring medical treatment somewhere else. But 53 men who had either been rejected by the dodgy refugee assessment process that had been taking place on Manus Island, or had refused to take part in it, were locked up in a new "Immigration Center" called Bomana in Port Moresby. Bomana was funded with $20 million by the Australian government.

The men have been incarcerated there since early August, without access to lawyers, without phones, without hope. Another refugee, Shaminda Kanapathi, who is currently in one of the hotels describes the situation:

"It is hard to know what is happening to them. They are being held with no freedom of movement and have no access to mobile phones. They cannot even communicate with their families – a deeper denial of their fundamental human rights beyond being indefinitely detained for nearly seven years. These 50 or so men have effectively been disappeared."

The pinnacle of cynicism is that some of those in Bomana were transferred to Port Moresby with the understanding of being "medevaced" (i.e. evacuated for medical treatment) to Australia. They were suffering from severe depression and had attempted suicide. But instead of treating them, Peter Dutton's Department of Home Affairs now accuses them of faking it in order to get to Australia and has locked them up.

The Australian government seems determined to slowly destroy the refugees. It's a recurring pattern – an announcement is made, like that of the closure of a camp, that gets their hopes up. But instead of getting better, the new situation is even worse than the previous one. The group that had stuck together for the past six years is now split up with some of them uncontactable.

Behrouz Boochani, the Kurdish journalist and author who was incarcerated on Manus for six years and is now in Port Moresby, described in his book *No Friend But The Mountains* how the system of random changes to bureaucratic procedures is designed to drive people insane. Now the victims are even locked up.

To complete the irony, on the same day the new prison in Port Moresby was opened, Boochani was awarded the $25,000 Australian National Biography Award for his book because it was an "astonishing act of witness and testament to the lifesaving power of writing as resistance." @@@

Micro-support:
a (partial) anarchist strategy

By Sam Buchanan

Sam Buchanan says we need to see the small actions everyone engages in as part of their everyday life as political action and crucial in the survival of communities. They need to be incorporated into an anarchist methodology.

THERE'S a whole lot of work that goes on at a community and inter-personal level which I think anarchists, and anarchism, would benefit from engaging in more. Nearly everyone is already doing this work already, I just want it better recognised, and validated as political work.

I'm dubbing this 'micro-support' as it's, amongst other things, a counter to the things called 'micro-aggression'. It's not really equivalent (and I think the focus on micro-aggressions in left social democrat circles is a bit of a con – a way of pretending to address discrimination while leaving the big things, colonisation, capitalism and class, unchallenged, but that's another story), I could just call it 'support' but sticking the prefix 'micro' at the front makes it sounds unintimidating, but important.

Micro-support includes things such as childcare, giving away spare fruit, free bicycle workshops, cooking lunch at the local school, sending people postcards, community gardening, calling up somebody who's having a hard time, organising a gig, putting on a neighbourhood fireworks party or a community dinner, and running sports clubs. It's a massive range of small things that keep people healthy and sane (or more healthy and sane than they would otherwise be). It's probably the majority of work that goes on in society and certainly crucial in keeping communities ticking over. Anne Else, in her book *False Economy: New Zealanders Face the Conflict Between Paid and Unpaid Work* called unpaid work 'the invisible infrastructure which keeps everything else going – a vast springboard-cum-safety net spread beneath the formal economy'.

You might be saying "So what?" at this point. Doesn't all this go without saying? Yes, which is part of the problem. If society can be characterised as having three basic sectors: community, the state and business, it's the former which always gets ignored. The state and business sectors spend an awful lot of time going on about themselves, and convincing people they matter and are essential. They sideline and minimise the community sector. Meanwhile, the community just gets on with the job of looking after everyone and doesn't have a public relations team to draw attention to it.

Little academic attention is paid to the community – unless the community dysfunctional. Then the sociologists, criminologists, et al leap in to examine and dissect it with enthusiasm. There's the odd bit of positive academic interest in communities that work – in feminist analysis and fields such as community psychology, but it's bugger all compared with the attention academics give to government and business. Most community projects remain undocumented and organising methods and skills aren't passed on. The achievements of community organising are soon forgotten.

The result is that the colossal amount of work that happens outside the state and business sectors gets taken for granted and treated as inconsequential. But if you removed it, the capitalist economy would collapse, and society would break down. The state and business simply lack the capacity to do all the things people do unpaid and unmanaged.

All the little things we do to support each other have a snowball effect, building trust, confidence, capacity and expectations in the people and groups around us. This makes radical change more likely. Unless this work is validated, and making visible, few people are going to believe us when we tell them communities can self-manage and provide for them. They want to see some evidence that communities can provide before they give up on capitalism and the state. And that evidence already exists, we just need to throw a spotlight onto it.

For anarchists, there's also the need to demonstrate our ideas in a practical way, to counter the propaganda unleashed against us. It's hard to paint us negative nutbars intent on disruption and violence if the people in our communities know us as the people that help out with making the lunchtime soup at the local school. And when the state's repression notches up, as it does from time to time, we need allies (or, at the very least, people who will give us the benefit of the doubt). Now and then I've run across over-confident anarchists thinking they could tough it out against the state without help. That usually lasts until the first police raid.

Here it's probably best to put in a disclaimer. I am NOT saying we don't need to do more confrontational and stroppy things from time to time. This is a PARTIAL strategy, not a complete one. There are many ways of doing things.

I can actually sum this all up in one word: Punk.

Looking back over years of political organising, I keep coming back to the accidental brilliance of punk. Beginning a movement with entertainment was a smart move, being broke and lacking resources made mutual aid and extensive networking – on a global scale, at times – essential. Punks are expert scavengers, good at welcoming the shy, hopeless and anti-social, and good at sharing skills. The DIY culture, lacking experts, keeps things simple and encourages participation – people can look at it and think "I could do that". And punks theorise about what they are doing, critiquing and discussing what works and doesn't. Punk was/is far from perfect, but its methods merit examination.

This work is also necessary for anarchists in order to maintain our mental health and stay positive. A lot of the things I'm talking about are quite fun, and a way to de-stress by getting some physical results here and now, things you can quantify or stand back and look at, rather than endlessly working towards a distant revolution.

Recently I spent much of a week washing dishes and cooking at the Ihumātao occupation. Nobody was much interested in my theoretical politics – they were just happy to have somebody who could run a kitchen and turn out a huge pile of sandwiches at short notice. The skills we are going to need in an uprising or mass movement are mostly practical ones. Now would be a good time to get some practice in. @@@

Case Study: Why I built a library

The Kapiti Coast's Deputy Mayor steps into The Old Whatsisname Memorial Library after cutting the ribbon at the 'official' opening ceremony. The free book swap facility is named after Kapiti's previous mayor and was built without permission on council land. This project served several purposes. Most people think I built it because I like people getting free books, but the main reasons were (a) I like building things and (b) stressed parents with small children need local destinations to take their kids to when everyone is grumpy and needs to get out of the house. Secondly, it's a good way to practice building skills – I think anarchists could be putting in sleep-outs for people we know between flats or otherwise in need of temporary accommodation. And it's pretty. As it went along, it became a satire of a municipal building – hence the name and the clock on the front, and the daft opening ceremony with the local dignitary presiding.

The Kapiti Deputy Mayor entering the library

Goals Without Strategies

The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone.

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. Penguin 2009

By Sam Buchanan

THE SPIRIT LEVEL was really big in social democratic circles a few years ago. I never bothered to read it then, because it sounded predictably weak (which it is), but a friend kept bugging me to read it and I ran across a second hand copy, so I did.

Basically the authors, epidemiologists who started out looking at health impacts of income levels, set out a case for a more economically equal society. They look at a wide variety of social indicators, including mental and physical health, life expectancy, violence, imprisonment, social mobility and others and make comparisons between a set of rich countries, and between US states. The conclusion over all the indicators is that not only are poor people better off in more equal countries, but so are rich and middle-class people.

For anarchists, that's an unsurprising conclusion, but the best thing about the book is the job the authors have done in backing their conclusion with statistical evidence. The worst thing about the book is they've no idea how to build a more equal society, which makes the whole thing a bit pointless.

Whenever you are thinking that they are going to quit with the critique of inequality and get around to suggesting something we could do about it, they just begin raking over the same old ground. Rather than discuss a better society, they keep drifting back to what's wrong with this one. Part Three of the book, titled 'A Better Society' ironically starts with a chapter titled 'Dysfunctional Societies'. You think you are getting there at chapter 16, titled 'Building the future' but that chapter begins with "Before discussing what should be done to make our societies more equal..." and launches into a discussion of inequalities between rich and poor countries. When you do get there, its all a bit vague. There's a very short discussion of cooperatives, non-profit institutions and worker-owned companies. Mostly it's just a lot of rhetoric about "one of the biggest transformations in human history", but it can't be too sudden or scary "the aim is to increase people's sense of security and to reduce fear; to make everyone feel that a more equal society has room for them...".

The authors say they don't back any particular policies as there's many routes to equality. Their strategy is to spread the word and hope that this will somehow translate into action. But while they say "Public opinion will only support the necessary political changes if something like the perspective we outline in this book permeates the public mind", the authors sashay between 'this is a grand new idea' and 'everyone thinks this already'. Referring to a US study they say "A large majority of people wanted society to 'move away from greed and excess toward a way of life more centered on values, community and family'" and "At an intuitive level people have always recognised that inequality is socially corrosive". So if everyone thinks this, and all it takes to make change is spreading ideas, why hasn't more equality happened already?

One might expect that a book about how we need more equality might discuss the history of movements dedicated to this goal. But nope, there's the odd very brief nod to the French Revolution or socialists, but it's a few sentences at best. One of the few bits of

Climate change protest at the stock exchange, Wellington, 2009

historical analysis rather undermines the author's own proposals – they cite a World Bank report claiming East Asian countries economic success was founded on policies to increase equality, these stemming from a crisis of legitimacy in the face of insurgencies and the Communist takeover in China. They then cite the examples of the British government increasing equality during the world wars in order to garner public support, and Sweden's policies resulting from a need to head of labour disputes that had culminated in the army firing on striking workers. "Rather than greater equality waiting till well-meaning governments think they can afford to make societies have usually not pursued more egalitarian policies until they thought their survival depended on it". These are not examples that give weight to the author's claim that we can bring about more equal societies simply through the dissemination of ideas.

At one point they do spell out what they want: "a more equal society in which people are less divided by status and hierarchy; a society in which we regain a sense of community, in which we overcome the threat of global warming, in which *we own and control our work democratically as part of a community of colleagues, and share in the benefits of a growing non-monetized sector of the economy*" (italics mine). So, as is often the case with social democrats either they want anarchism, but don't know that anarchism is the name given to what they are calling for, or they are just getting carried away by their own rhetoric and don't really want the transformation of society they are demanding.

All this makes the book mind-bogglingly frustrating, like a whole lot of other social democratic projects. Do the authors really want a transformation of society, or just tweak it? Do they actually think that they can transform society without a strategy to defeat resistance from established power interests? Are they so naive as to suppose the ruling class can be talked into changing the whole foundation of the economy by convincing them they'll actually be happier if they give up power?

This is the whole problem with social democratic attempts to improve society. There's no real strategy for dealing with power. There's a whole bunch of optimism, grand statements and wishful thinking, but an unwillingness to admit that there are forces determined to prevent change, which social democrats have no plan to deal with. Capitalism has never been known to give in to public opinion, and it holds governments in thrall by threatening economic catastrophe if its interests are tampered with. Social democrats have no real answer to this conundrum – they prefer to ignore it and grumble that you are pessimistic if you point it out. And their track record doesn't demonstrate any ability to get us anywhere.

The Spirit Level was all the rage a few years ago, the book's authors set up a trust to spark a movement for change. It still exists but the change, and the movement that the book was supposed to spark, hasn't happened.

@@@

Ihumātao solidarity protest in Wellington, August 2019

BOOK REVIEW

Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou

Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou: Struggle Without End

Ranginui Walker (1st ed 1990), (2nd ed 2004)

By Sojourn

IN 1990, when the country was officially planning events to mark 150 years of te Tiriti o Waitangi, Ranginui Walker's *Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou* was published. At the time the book was considered controversial even though there actually wasn't much new in it, what was different was that it was the story of this land told from Māori viewpoint. For a change we got to read a history of this land that wasn't a Pākehā centered interpretation of the colonization of this land.

Growing up in the 1970s and '80s, it felt like many people believed the hegemonic myths that portrayed Māori as helpless victims of progress, people who stumbled upon these shores by chance and then were nearly wiped out after the arrival of the British. The facts and stories about the settlement of this land were ignored but Ranginui Walker's book changed that. He put in one place and in a very readable and accessible format, a story of the land that did not center Pākehā.

Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou can be divided into three sections: firstly, the origins of the Māori and the settling of this land, followed by the arrival of the Pākeha, then finally the resistance by Māori to not only the imperialistic powers of especially the British crown but also to the longer-term effects of colonisation.

The book does not white-wash the colonisation of this land but shows it as a deliberate annexation by the British crown to further their imperialistic aims. An aim that continued with the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi. The British crown tried desperately to minimize Māori input into the management of the country but Māori fought to retain their mana and tino rangatiratanga; they fought for justice, liberation and self-determination. Both resistance, and also attempts, by Māori to control the crown and mitigate the effects of colonization are portrayed in *Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou*.

The result is that in this telling of the story of this land, Māori are shown as key agents in the shaping of this world we now inhabit. And people who never gave up fighting colonialism and imperialism, and never will.

To challenge the colonial mindset of the political power in this country, for any hope of justice and peace in this land, we need to know the stories of resistance.

'Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou'

Ake Ake Ake

@@@